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October 27, 2011

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## Afghan Journalists Launch Professional Network

**KABUL, AFGHANISTAN** — Dozens of prominent Afghan journalists and politicians, U.S. and Afghan government officials, and donor community representatives gathered in Kabul today for a ceremony launching the Nai Graduate Club. The Nai Graduate Club is a network linking up working journalists from all over Afghanistan who have taken Nai media courses.

Since it was first established in 2005, Nai Supporting Open Media, an Afghan non-governmental organization, has empowered independent media and promoted freedom of expression in Afghanistan through training, advocacy, and production assistance. More than 3,000 journalists have received training through Nai programs.

USAID-funded Nai centers in Mazar-i Sharif, Herat, Kandahar, Jalalabad, and Kabul offer journalists practical, in-depth video, radio, and technical media courses, using equipment on par with industry standards.

Speaking at the launch ceremony, Deputy Minister for Information and Culture Mohammad Mobarez Rashidi said, "We would never have witnessed such a dramatic growth in the Afghan media sector without the generous support of the United States."

The Nai Graduate Club will connect Nai alumni throughout Afghanistan, providing a space for media professionals to share their work, exchange ideas and experience, offer advice, mentor others, and discuss the critical issues faced by journalists in Afghanistan. This professional network will naturally feed into Nai's Media Watch campaign, which raises awareness about journalist's rights and strengthens the media's right to access to information. It also is also aimed at enabling its members to establish relationships with government officials, civil-society organizations, and communities nationwide.

"USAID has proudly supported independent media in Afghanistan because we believe that the media has a critical role to play in the future of Afghanistan, including fostering dialogue between citizens and their government, and creating a sense of community and national identity across the country," said USAID Office of Democracy and Governance Director David Thompson.

USAID's Afghanistan Media Development and Empowerment Project, implemented by Internews Network, Inc., builds the capacity of local independent media through technical support, equipment upgrades, hands-on training, business development, and the strengthening of media industry institutions, networks, and associations to increase media professionalism and standards of practice. ###

For more information, please visit: <http://www.nai.org.af/en/nai-graduate-club>.

For more information about USAID's programs, please visit: <http://afghanistan.usaid.gov>

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